The Musical Times

Schumann's Symphony in E Flat. The Rhenish, Op. 97

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Source: *The Musical Times*, Vol. 50, No. 802 (Dec. 1, 1909), pp. 789-792
Published by: Musical Times Publications Ltd.
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/905849
Accessed: 27-12-2015 06:30 UTC

SCHUMANN'S SYMPHONY IN E FLAT
THE RHENISH, OP. 97.

BY SIR GEORGE GROVE, C.B.

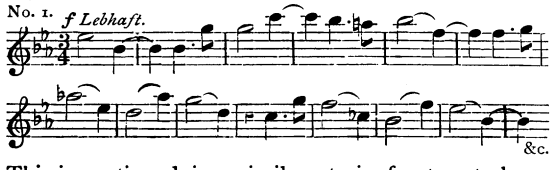
1. *Lebhaft.*
2. *Sehr mässig.*
3. *Nicht schnell.*
4. *Feierlich.*
5. *Lebhaft.*

This splendid Symphony, though numbered third, is really the last of Schumann's four. It was composed between November 2 and December 9, 1850, and therefore very shortly after its author had entered on his office as Director of the Music at Düsseldorf, of which he first discharged the public functions on the 24th of the preceding October. The Symphony is known in Germany as 'the Rhenish' (die Rheinische), probably because Schumann was in the habit of saying that the first impulse towards its composition had been given to his mind by the sight of the Cathedral at Cologne, and strengthened by the grand ceremonial of the installation there of the Archbishop as Cardinal which he witnessed while engaged on the Symphony.

Though not himself a Rhinelander—for he was born at Zwickau, in Northern Bohemia—no one could be a warmer worshipper of the great river of Germany than Schumann, as his two songs, 'Sonntags am Rhein,' and 'Im Rhein, im heiligen Strome,' testify without any evidence from this Symphony to back them. The impression which the ceremony referred to made on his mind finds a place in the fourth movement, or introduction to the *Finale*, which in the MS. score is entitled 'Im Character der Begleitung einer feierlichen Ceremonie'—as if to accompany a religious ceremonial. The other portions of his work Schumann used to say were intended to have a popular or national (*volksthümlich*) cast, which is most perceptible in the second (answering to the usual *Scherzo* or *Minuet*) and last movements, and is probably also implied in the fact that the headings of the movements are given (after Beethoven) in German instead of in Italian as usual.

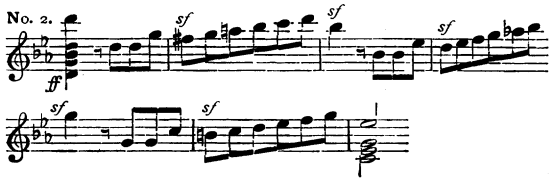
I. The first movement (*Lebhaft*), in E flat, starts at once with its vigorous principal subject, scored for full orchestra, accompanied by the second violins and violas in chords of quavers, and by the rest of the band in notes corresponding with those of the theme. As one listens to this striking opening, it is impossible not to feel that the composer has something original to say and that he means to say it in his own fashion. The strong rhythm in sections of two bars is a marked feature :

No. 1. *f Lebhaft.*



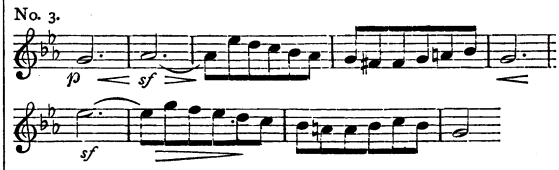
This is continued in a similar strain for twenty bars, and is then attacked *fortissimo* by horns, bassoons, violas, and basses; but hardly has its repetition begun, before the following energetic subordinate theme is introduced at the fifth bar :

No. 2.



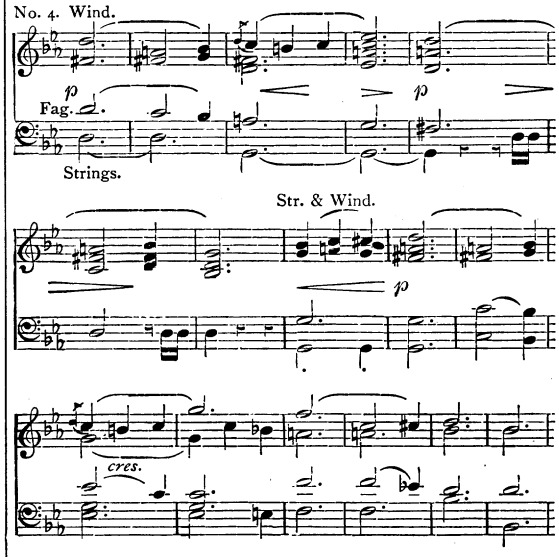
and again—after a few bars *diminuendo* on the phrase in the fifth and sixth bars of our quotation from the principal subject (No. 1)—a second subordinate subject of importance is introduced :

No. 3.



An interlude of twelve bars leads back to the tonic, and starts the principal subject again *fortissimo;* the two subordinates follow, though transferred to keys which modulate gradually towards G minor, in which key the 'second subject' proper is then introduced, melodious in character, and in instrumentation and rhythm a complete and charming contrast to what has preceded it :

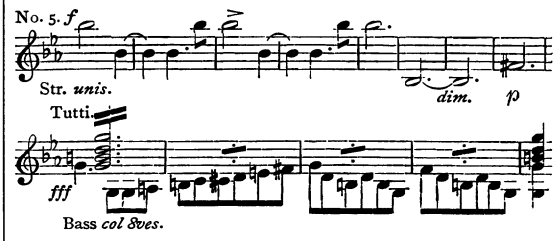
No. 4. Wind.



After this the rhythm of the first subject is returned to, and the first part of the movement is speedily brought to a close in B flat, chiefly by transposed material from the different motives.

At this point in the movement a repetition of the entire first part generally takes place; but Schumann breaks through the rule and proceeds at once to the middle portion or development of his movement in the following surprising manner, leaping at one bound from the key of B flat to that of G major :

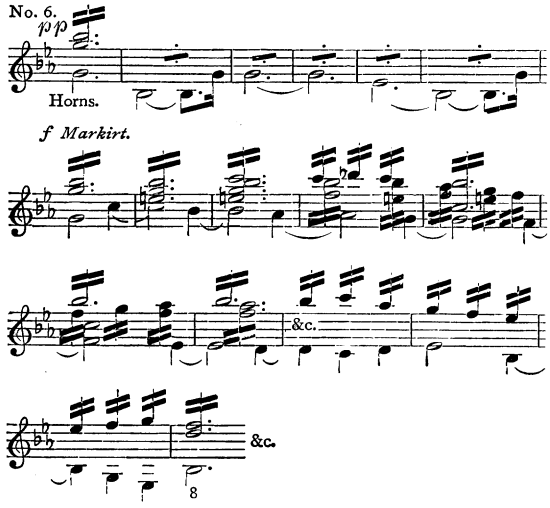
No. 5. *f*



From this point the different subjects and phrases above quoted are worked thematically with great ingenuity and effect for nearly 200 bars. The fiery principal theme and its more graceful and feminine relative, the second subject (No. 4), change places over and over again, but never reappear without being transferred to another key and adorned with some fresh blossom or ornament.

The short interlude by means of which the modulatory changes and connections of the two chief themes are managed, is constructed first on the first subordinate (No. 2), and then—doubtless with a view to avoid monotony—on new branch-themes, which seem gradually to grow as it were out of the roots of the first and second subjects. The keys of F, E flat, B flat minor, are used for the second, and those of A flat minor, B major, E flat minor, and F sharp major, for the first subject.

The climax of this wonderful piece of development is reached on the re-entrance of the principal subject in E flat—that is to say, at the beginning of the third part of the movement, or the recapitulation. The entrance is prepared for by a passage of forty-four bars in length, beginning as follows :

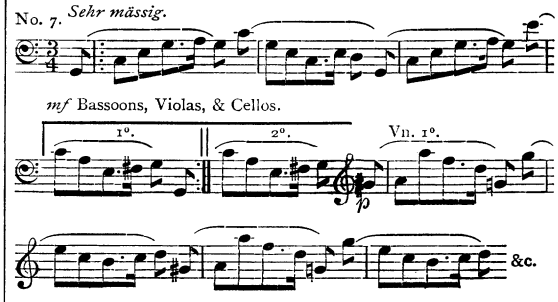


The return to the key of E flat after so long an absence and so much persistent and almost over-rich modulation, the mysterious *pianissimo tremolo* in the strings, accompanying the melodic strain constructed on the principal subject and played *forte* above the B flat pedal note in the bass, combine to produce something not alone new, but also—too much lost sight of in the music of the last half of the nineteenth century—extremely charming. There are few finer passages in Schumann, or indeed in any orchestral music, than this return of the first subject.

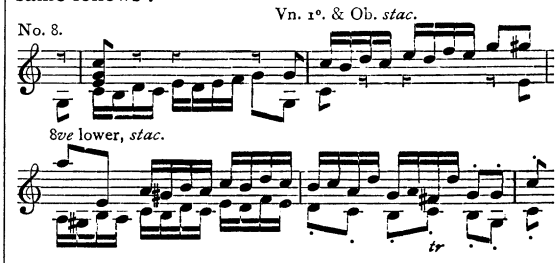
After this the third part of the movement begins *fortissimo*. It consists of the usual repetitions from the first part of all the leading subjects, with the matter of the second subject transferred to its relative keys (viz., from G minor and B flat to C minor and E flat), and materially abridged. A vigorous *Coda* in keeping with what has preceded it and closing in the tonic key, completes this noble *Vivace*.

It is indeed not too much to say that in this movement we have Schumann at his best. While retaining all his individuality and giving utterance to uncommon ideas, he is never even vague. The music never flags, the art with which the various subjects are alternated and contrasted sustains the interest throughout, and from the first bar to the last we feel that the composer is working within his means. Without doubt, whenever this *Vivace* is heard the claims of Schumann to be a master of music in its highest form will want no other advocacy.

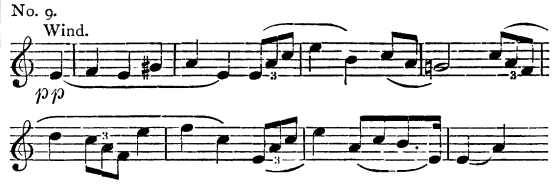
II. The second movement of the work—*Sehr mässig* (or, to use the more customary Italian phrase, *Molto moderato*)—stands in the place of the *Scherzo*; but instead of the quick and lively time usual in modern *Scherzos*, we have a piece in the mould of the more antiquated and dignified *Menuet galante*. Its principal melodies are the following :



each being repeated so as to form a melody of two parts of sixteen bars each. A free variation of the same follows :

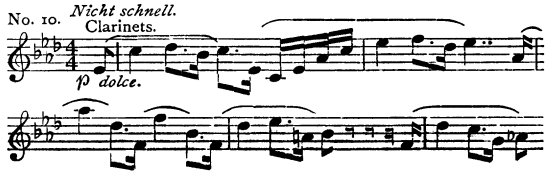


This is worked out with great ingenuity in all sorts of imitations—for instance the occurrence of the first theme (No. 7) in the violoncellos, with the semiquaver figure of No. 8 above it. The figure is then used as an accompaniment to the plaintive and very individual *Trio* in A minor—a 'Trio' to all intents and purposes, though not designated as such :



This has likewise its two parts of eight bars each. The pedal C in the bass, which prevails through a great part of this *Trio*, is an 'organ-point' on the third of the key, and as such is an innovation on the regular rules for 'organ-points'; but, as in most cases of innovations by men of genius, it becomes perfectly logical and legitimate when properly considered—and besides it is delightful to hear, which, after all, is the main point. The rest of this pleasant movement is framed chiefly on the material already quoted. Its dignified humour is preserved throughout.

III. The third movement—'*Nicht schnell*,' in A flat—is in fact a short *Andante*, and has the unpretending form and spirit of a 'Song without words.' Its subjects are of a calm and conversational character, the orchestra is reduced by the omission of the drums and of all noisy brass, and the whole has the dreamy air of some mediæval Rhine legend. It opens with the following melody :

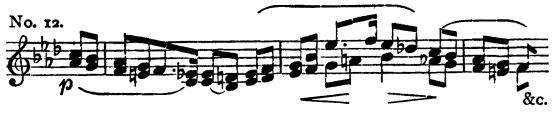


a second theme follows :

No. 11. *Sehr getragen.*

and then a third in the bassoons and violas, with a pretty moving figure in the violoncellos (not quoted) :

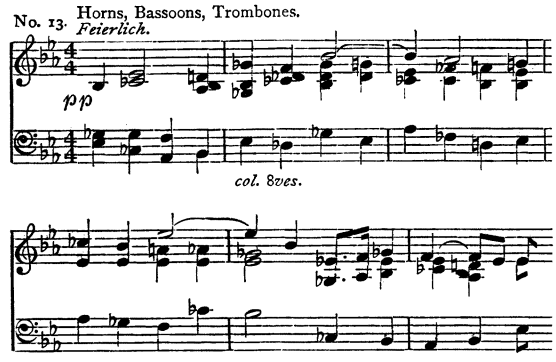
No. 12.



The whole forms a charming little picture of repose and sweet sadness, with a close of especial beauty.

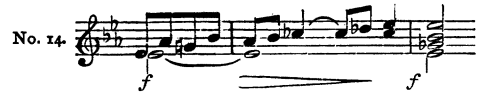
IV. The fourth movement, '*Feierlich*' (or *religioso*), in E flat minor, embodies, as already stated, the impressions received by the composer when witnessing the enthronement of the Cardinal in the Cathedral of Cologne. The orchestra is again enlarged to its fullest extent ; indeed, it will be noticed that the trombones—'Tuba mirum spargens sonum'—which Mendelssohn used to say were 'too sacred to be often used' and which Schumann in his first Symphony showed that he knew well how to handle with religious effect, are here introduced for the first time in the work. The opening subject, in E flat minor and in true antique ecclesiastical cast, is as follows :

No. 13. Horns, Bassoons, Trombones. *Feierlich.*



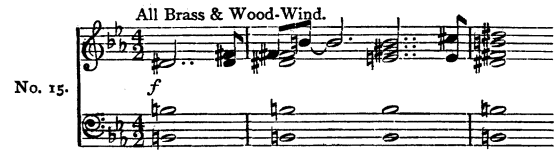
With the closing E flat of this theme the following interlude, founded on a previous subject, is associated :

No. 14.



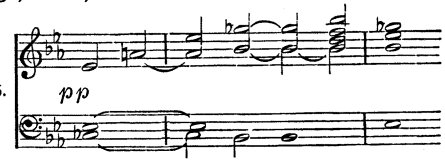
The original subject is then continued, mostly treated 'in imitation' in the fourth and fifth. The interlude-phrase is likewise added and treated in imitation, so that by degrees the movement takes for some time the form of a miniature double fugue. The first variation is marked by a conversion of the rhythm from quadruple to triple time ; the second variation by a return from triple to quadruple time, with a new tremolo accompaniment in the violoncellos, violas, and second violins. Lastly, its flow is unexpectedly and most effectively arrested by the following solemn *Fanfare* in B major :

No. 15. All Brass & Wood-Wind.



answered *pianissimo* with magical effect by the strings, flutes, and oboes :

No. 16.

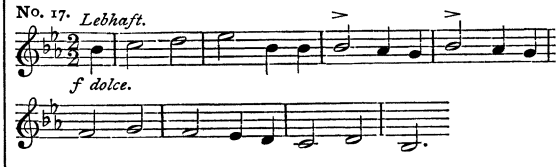


The strain in B major (No. 15) is then repeated *fortissimo*, and a short modulatory interlude leads back to a closing cadence in E flat minor. This movement bears witness that harmony and counterpoint, even when employed in the 'Stilo ecclesiastica,' can be made powerful dramatic agents, for the whole section contains but one melodic theme of eight bars, and yet the picture which it aims to represent is complete, and the impressions made upon the mind of a great poet by thousands of people accompanying a solemn ecclesiastical ceremony in the magnificent Cathedral of Cologne are faithfully preserved within these wonderful sixty-eight bars of instrumental music. To some it will recall the feelings aroused by the grand climax of the slow movement in Beethoven's 'Eroica' symphony, which has also the effect of a religious ceremonial in a vast building. And higher praise can hardly be given it.

V. Of the fifth movement, '*Lebhaft*' (or *Vivace*), we learn from Schumann's biographer that the composer aimed to embody in it the bustle and flow of Rhenish holiday life on coming out into the town, it is lawful to suppose after the conclusion of the ceremony in the Cathedral. It returns to the popular or national character of the earlier movements, and is written in the usual form of a symphony *Finale.*

Its first part contains three thoroughly developed melodies. The first

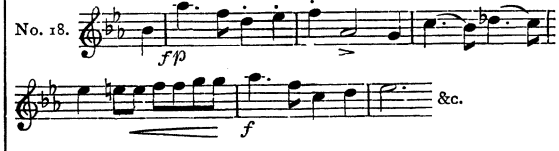
No. 17. *Lebhaft.*



is of course in E flat, given out by the strings and soft wind and repeated by the whole orchestra.

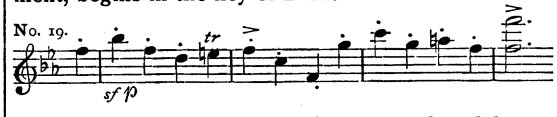
The second, if it be not rather the continuation of the first, is also in E flat and is a most lively strain :

No. 18.



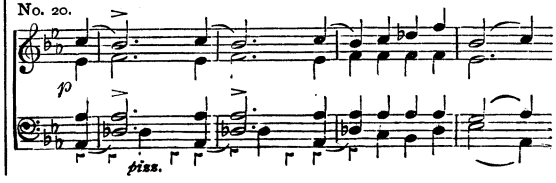
The third, properly the counter-theme of the movement, begins in the key of B flat

No. 19.



in very light style, but is quickly abandoned by an unusual turn into the key of A flat on a new melody :

No. 20.



These themes all partake of the character of dance tunes. In the transition of them from the first two to the third, the theme of the preceding movement (No. 11) is introduced; and at the thematic treatment in the middle part, the interlude phrase of the same movement is introduced and worked in imitation in connection with the different subjects of the *Finale*. Towards the end of the movement in the *Coda*, the ecclesiastical subject of the fourth movement is introduced in close imitation, accompanied by a figure in the violoncellos, in 6-4 time. A short and festive *Stretto* concludes the work brilliantly.

[The symphony was first performed at Düsseldorf on February 6, 1851. It was introduced into England by Signor Luigi Arditi, who conducted it at a Promenade Concert, Covent Garden Theatre, on December 4, 1865. The Crystal Palace followed on February 10, 1866; the Hallé Concerts, Manchester, on February 4, 1869; and the Philharmonic Society (London), on April 25, 1870.—ED. *M.T.*]

Reviews.

The snow. Fly, singing bird. By Edward Elgar. Arranged for mixed voices by John Pointer.

Wrong not, sweet Empress. Part-song for mixed voices. By C. Hubert H. Parry.

[Novello & Co., Ltd.]

A fresh lease of popularity is opened out for Sir Edward Elgar's favourite part-songs 'The snow' and 'Fly, singing bird,' originally designed for female voices, by their arrangement for mixed voices by Mr. John Pointer. An artistic sense of judgment has been exercised in the apportioning of the original voice parts to the new combination and in the introduction of a bass part. No alterations have been made in either key or pianoforte and string accompaniment.

Sir Hubert Parry's 'Wrong not, sweet Empress,' a setting of words by Sir Walter Raleigh, is an elegant little piece which reveals the composer's individuality and distinctive artistic qualities in every detail.

An Eastern lament. Daffodils. Osme's song. Composed by Cyril Scott.

There is a garden in her face. Words by Thomas Campion. Music by George Lowe.

[Elkin & Co.]

Though widely differing in character, the three songs by Mr. Cyril Scott, whose titles are given above, are strongly coloured by the composer's individual methods. In these short pieces he has rightly preserved a definite tonality, varied here and there by sudden momentary excursions into more or less distant keys. For instance, in 'Daffodils'—which is written almost entirely in the key of C major—the composer introduces, for one bar only, a chord that belongs as much as anything to the key of C sharp minor. The most important feature of 'Daffodils' is, however, the fact that the vocal part is melody, pure and simple, from beginning to end. In 'An Eastern lament' the appropriate mood and colouring are found, but their effect is somewhat impaired by a certain rhythmic monotony in the voice part. 'Osme's song,' a setting of words by George Darley, that invite lads and lasses to 'trip it neatly and foot it featly o'er the grassy turf to me,' is carried along in bright style by a dancing accompaniment.

Mr. George Lowe's 'There is a garden in her face' represents an attempt to reproduce the musical style of an early period as being appropriate to a setting of words written three centuries ago. The simple, dignified tune of the first verse is repeated in the second and third, while the accompaniment is varied in a manner that might have been adopted by some composer of the contrapuntal school.

Symphony in A flat. By Edward Elgar. Arranged for pianoforte duet by Sigfrid Karg-Elert.

On the cliffs of Cornwall. By Ethel M. Smyth. Arranged for pianoforte by the composer.

Gavotte in G. By A. von Ahn Carse.

Cantilène Romanesque. By Henry J. Edwards.

Autumn. By James Lyon.

Suite, 'Nero.' By S. Coleridge-Taylor.

[Novello & Co., Ltd.]

In transcribing Elgar's Symphony as a pianoforte duet, Herr Karg-Elert has worked under favourable conditions for realising all the effect that the work can produce without the aid of orchestral colour. In some passages the exquisite detail, in others the massive harmonies, can be effectually laid out for four hands, while the executive demands can be kept within bounds. The same care and skill have been exercised in this as in the arrangement for pianoforte solo.

It cannot be said that the well-known Prelude 'On the cliffs of Cornwall' that introduces Act II. of Miss Ethel Smyth's opera 'The Wreckers,' makes an ideal pianoforte piece. But no one who has heard an orchestral performance of the Prelude can fail to be interested in examining and analysing the marvellous, vaguely-shifting harmonic tissue, as laid forth in the cold, colourless pianoforte score. They will find that the orchestral colouring was by no means the chief factor in producing the ingenious and novel effects for which the piece is notable.

The pieces by Messrs. von Ahn Carse, Edwards and Lyon, whose titles are given above, respond well to the demand for new and easy 'drawing room' pianoforte music. All are melodious and capable of effect, and while they impose no difficulty upon the average executant, present many details that will command his or her attention. The 'Gavotte' is transcribed from a Suite for violin. 'Autumn' is to be obtained arranged for organ or accompanied violin solo.

The fluency and individuality of Mr. Coleridge-Taylor's style are well illustrated in the Suite 'Nero,' which the composer has transcribed for pianoforte from his incidental music to Mr. Stephen Phillips's play. The four movements, 'Prelude,' 'Intermezzo,' 'Eastern Dance' and 'Finale,' provide an interesting study and are characterized by constant interest and variety in the melodies, harmonies and figures of accompaniment.

Fifth sonata, in E. By Carlo Albanesi.

Humoresque. By York Bowen.

Transmutations of an original theme in the form of five characteristic pieces. By Paul Corder.

[G. Ricordi & Co.]

Like his earlier works Mr. Carlo Albanesi's Sonata is well written both from a musical and technical point of view. Even if the composer has nothing particularly new and original to say, he expresses himself with taste and in well-chosen phrases. Of the three movements of which the Sonata consists, the first, an *Allegro moderato*, is perhaps the most satisfactory, the composer having employed the rhythms of the Bolero and the Polonaise with considerable success. The second part is a theme—*Andante*, in C sharp minor—with nine variations. The last movement is a lively and brilliant *Allegro alla marcia*, which in the hands of a capable performer would doubtless sound very effective.

Mr. York Bowen, in his Humoresque, has composed a very clever and delightfully attractive piece, in which he frequently employs the scale of succeeding whole-tones (à la Debussy) with strikingly comical effects. The title 'Humoresque' has seldom, if ever, been used with greater justification.

On a short theme of eight bars (*Andante semplice*) Mr. Paul Corder has constructed five really 'Characteristic pieces,' in which the skill displayed in manipulating the rhythm is perhaps the most prominent feature. As may be imagined, in a work of this kind the whole makes the impression of being more reflective than inspired, but within these limits the composer shows real musicianship, and his technical powers are quite remarkable.